

Testimony at the Michigan House/Feb 29/2012
Fawwaz T. Ulaby

Good afternoon.

My name is Fawwaz Ulaby, I am a professor of electrical engineering and computer science at the university of Michigan, and I previously served as the university's vice president for research for 7 years, from 1999 to 2006. Over the years, I've had the privilege of mentoring over 100 phd students.

I appreciate this opportunity to speak in support of the Bill, and I do so not only on my own behalf, but also on behalf of 785 co-signers of a petition addressed to the Board of Regents of the University of Michigan. The petition admonishes the Board for advancing a policy that would undermine the educational experience of thousands of graduate students. I am speaking, of course, of the Regents policy to unionize Graduate Student Research Assistants. The petition--which was signed by 324 faculty, 438 graduate students, and 2 members of the University's Board of Regents--is unprecedented, at least in the recent history of the university. No university policy or event has garnered such vehement opposition to the Board of Regents. I should also note that the position articulated in the petition—which I shall share with you momentarily-- is in concert with statements expressed by the university's president, Mary Sue Coleman, as well as by the deans of all its schools and colleges.

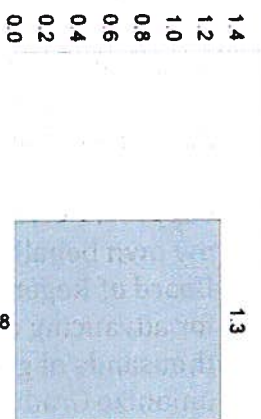
The question of unionizing GSRAs is not about democrats vs republicans, nor about pro or anti-union. In fact the policy advanced by the Board of Regents is denounced by democrats, republicans, and independents alike, and that's because it has nothing to do with whether unions are good or bad, but it has everything to do with the fact that GSRAs are students and not employees. The very concept of unionizing students is ludicrous.

Graduate students attend the university to pursue graduate degrees. This statement is true for ALL graduate students. Since most GSRAs are phd seeking students, I'll focus on the phd degree. The overall group of phd-seeking students consists of 4 subgroups:

- (1) self-supported students, and some of those may be receiving financial aid from external sources, as would be the case of a foreign student supported by his/her government,
- (2) students who receive financial aid in the form of a Fellowship administered by the university. The funding source may be a corporation, such as the Intel Corporation, it may be a Federal agency, such as NSF, or it may be UM itself. Those are the Fellowship grad students,
- (3) GSRAs who receive financial aid from grants and contracts received by the university to support research ideas proposed by its faculty, and
- (4) Graduate Student Instructors (GSI) who are paid by the university for teaching courses or labs.

Electrical Engineering - EE-Photonics Trk - Master's

Avg. Years to degree



Grad

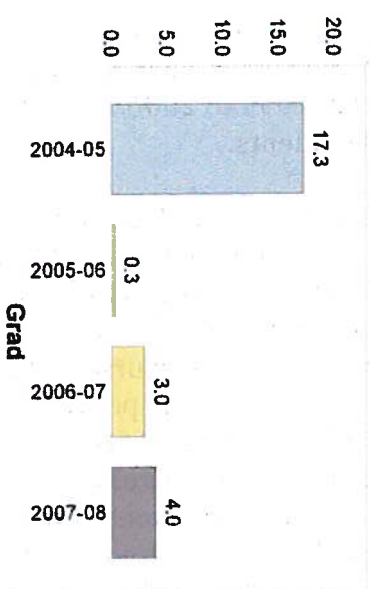
**Time to degree = [Degree Term Granted] minus [First Term at Student Level (Undergrad, Masters, Doctorate)]

Includes enrolled and non-enrolled semesters. A year is 3 semesters.

Source: SDCF & DEGREE_FACT & CF_RP_ENTRY_DTE_DIM

Electrical Engineering - Electro-Optics Trk - Master's

Avg. Years to degree



**Time to degree = [Degree Term Granted] minus [First Term at Student Level (Undergrad, Masters, Doctorate)]

Includes enrolled and non-enrolled semesters. A year is 3 semesters.

Source: SDCF & DEGREE_FACT & CF_RP_ENTRY_DTE_DIM

All four groups of grad students are at the university to pursue the phd degree, all have to take the same examinations, namely the qualifying exam, the Prelim Exam and the final defense of their dissertations, and each student has to carry out a significant research investigation and report his/her findings in the form of a dissertation. In other words, the system treats all four groups identically as far as the steps and evaluations involved in the phd degree program. They are all grad students, and the form of financial aid they may or may not receive has no bearing on their research goals or how they are evaluated.

Now let's talk a bit about GSIs. A GSI is both a grad student and an employee. He/she is a university employee because he/she is hired to teach a specific course, of specific duration and level of effort, and with commensurate pay. Accordingly, GSIs are eligible to form a union, and they did so after the 1981 MERC ruling. GSIs are part of a larger group of part-time teaching employees at the university, which includes lecturers, who are not students, and adjunct faculty. Adjunct faculty are individuals who typically hold regular jobs outside the university but are hired to teach at the university on a part-time basis.

A GSI is a student so far as his/her dissertation research is concerned, but he/she is an employee performing a job that is totally unrelated to his/her dissertation research. If a GSI teaches for the university for, say, 3 years, none of that effort will advance him towards the phd degree, because that effort is totally separate and unrelated to the research investigation he has to undertake to complete a successful dissertation. In contrast, for the GSRA, for the Fellowship student and for the self-supported student, ALL their efforts are focused on the research leading to their dissertations. Thus, GSRAs are indistinguishable from Fellowship and self-supported grad students. They are students, not employees. This is the practice at Michigan and at every top-tier university in the country.

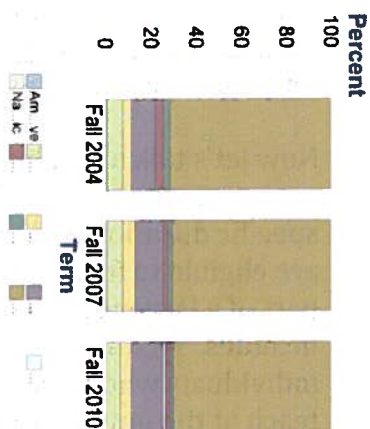
Since GSRAs are indistinguishable from self-supported students and Fellowship students, if GSRAs were to be unionized, then logic would dictate that all grad students should be unionized, and by extension, the same logic would apply to undergraduates, and while we're at it, why not unionize high school students as well? Unionizing GSRAs is simply absurd.

In closing, I thank the sponsors of this bill for reaffirming and codifying the 1981 MERC decision, and for putting an end to the turmoil precipitated by the democratic party members of the university's Board of Regents.

As a Michigan resident who voted for the democratic ticket on every election for the past 25 years(except for voting for Joe Schwartz when he ran for the US congress), I appeal to both the Republican party and Democratic party members of the house to support this Bill and to remind the members of the Board of regents of the University of Michigan that they were elected by the citizens of Michigan to serve the best interests of the university, not to pursue irresponsible ideological misadventures. Thank you

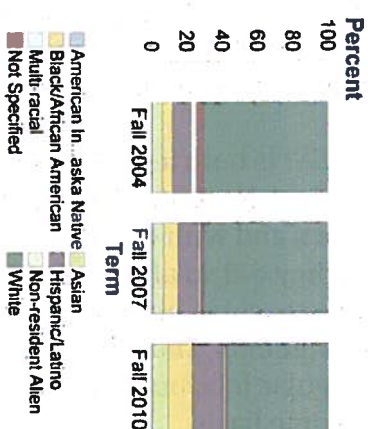
Headcount by Ethnicity

Computer Science



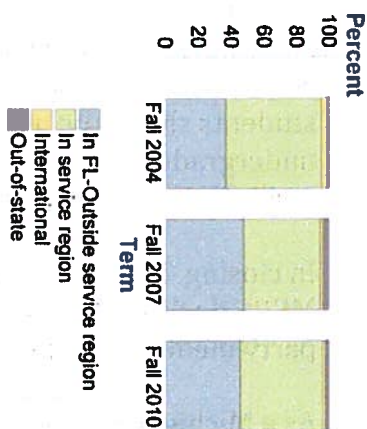
Headcount by Ethnicity

Information Technology



Headcount by Service Area

Computer Science



Headcount by Service Area

Information Technology

